

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00
INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03
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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9799
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 0768

PARIS AND BRUSSELS FOR LABATT

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, PGOV, PINR, TS
SUBJ: UGTT SOURCE DISCUSSES LEADERSHIP STATUS, BOURGUIBA
HEALTH, AND LIBYA

REF: TUNIS 0708

1. THAMEUR ACHOUR, SON OF ARRESTED UGTT LEADER HABIB ACHOUR,
VISITED LABATT AT HOME 7 A.M., WEDNESDAY, FEB 1, IN HIGHLY
AGITATED, FEARFUL STATE, UNUSUAL FOR THAMEUR. HE RELATED THAT
THE YOUNGER BROTHER HABIB ACHOUR, JR. (31 AND MARRIED) HAD
JUST BEEN ARRESTED FROM THE ELDER ACHOUR RESIDENCE. HE SAID
HIS MARRIED SISTER CHEDLIA TURKI HAD BEEN INVITED FOR QUESTIONING
10 A.M. THE SAME DAY. HE SAID ENTIRE FAMILY (SEVEN SISTERS,
THREE BROTHERS) HAD RETURNED TO TUNIS. THEY EXTREMELY CONCERNED
WELFARE AND WHEREABOUTS OF HABIB ACHOUR, NOW IN POLICE CUSTODY
SINCE EVENING OF JAN 29. THAMEUR ACHOUR HIMSELF SAID THAT HE
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EXPECTS TO BE ARRESTED SOMETIME TODAY.

2. THAMEUR ESPECIALLY CONCERNED SINCE "SOURCE CLOSE TO
PRESIDENTIAL PALACE" TOLD HIM HABIB BOURGUIBA, JR. NOW
VACATIONING IN SWITZERLAND, TELEPHONED SENIOR GOT OFFICIALS
DEMANDING DEATH PENALTIES FOR ALL UGTT HIGH LEADERSHIP.

3. THE YOUNGER ACHOUR STATED THAT BY HIS BEST ESTIMATES, 800 UGTT LEADERS AND CADRE WERE NOW UNDER ARREST NATIONWIDE. THIS VIRTUALLY EVACUATED LEADERSHIP OF THE CONFEDERATION AND ITS UNIONS AND HE COULD THINK OF NO SINGLE FEDERATION HEAD OR UGTT RESPONSIBLE FIGURE NOW FREE WITH WHOM LABATT COULD MEET. HE ALLEGED THAT MANY OF THE 800 IN POLICE CUSTODY WERE UNDERGOING PHYSICAL DURESS TO EXTRACT RESIGNATIONS OR DENUNCIATIONS OF UGTT LEADERSHIP.

4. THAMEUR ACHOUR SAID THAT THE SOURCE MENTIONED ABOVE TOLD HIM TEN HOURS AGO THAT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA HAD BEEN COUGHING UP BLOOD AND WAS NEAR DEATH. HE SAID THAT A TEAM OF SWISS DOCTORS, AMONG THEM A DR. GIDE, WAS IN ATTENDANCE.

5. HE PROTESTED THAT THAT THE UGTT/LIBYA CONNECTION HAD BEEN BLOWN OUT OF PROPORTION BY GOT IN ORDER TO DISCREDIT THE UNION. HE SAID THAT EARLIER PRIME MINITER NOUIRA AND HIS FATHER HAD COLLABORATED IN THE ARRANGEMENTS WITH LIBYA TO ACCEPT SOME OF THE SURPLUS TUNISIAN WORK FORCE. THAMEUR CONCEDED THAT THIS HAD BEEN A GRAVE ERROR ON THE UGTT'S PART BECAUSE IT ALLOWED GOT TO DOWNGRADE THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING NEW EMPLOYMENT. HE SAID THAT HIS FATHER HAD REJECTED POLITICAL ALLIANCE WITH LIBYA, TELLING COL. QADHAFI THAT NEITHER TUNISIA NOR UGTT WOULD ACCEPT A LIBYA-STYLE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP. RHETORICALLY HE REMARKED, "DOESN'T THAT SEEM IRONIC IN LIGHT OF THE LAST EIGHT DAYS' EVENTS?". HE MENTIONED, ALMOST IN PASSING, THAT COL. CONFIDENTIAL

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ZINE ABDINE BEN ALI, THE NEWLY-NAMED DIRECTOR OF SURETE, IS NOW, AND HAS BEEN FOR SOME TIME, IN THE PAY OF COL. QADHAFI. HE STATED THAT "IT SHOULD VERY EASY FOR THE AMERICANS TO ANALYSE THE TRUTH OF THIS." HE POINTED OUT TOO THAT ZINE ABDINE HAD BEEN ON THE LIST OF POTENTIAL MINISTERS OF THE NOW-DEFUNCT MERGER BETWEEN TUNISIA AND LIBYA. ACHOUR FELT THAT THE TRUE BENEFICIARIES EMERGING FROM TUNISIA'S CURRENT TURMOIL WOULD BE COL. QADHAFI, ABDALLAH FARHAT, AND MOHAMED SAYAH. HE SAID THAT "PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA'S DAYS ARE NUMBERED AS ARE MY FATHER'S."

6. WE EMPHASIZE THAT EMBASSY TRANSMITS THIS INFORMATION AS UNVERIFIED -- AND PERHAPS UNVERIFIABLE -- ALLEGATION.
MULCAHY

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